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Recollecting Wondrous Moments: Father Pushkin, Mother Russia, and Intertextual Memory in Tatyana Tolstaya's "Night" and "Limpopo"

Abstract

With their references to Alexander Pushkin, Tolstaya's "Night" and "Limpopo" respond to the cultural crisis of 1980s Russia, where literary language, bent for so long into the service of totalitarianism, suffers the scars of amnesia. Recycling Pushkin's tropes, particularly his images of feminine inspiration derived from the cultural archetype of Mother Russia, Tolstaya's stories appear nostalgically to rescue Russia's literary memory, but they also accentuate the crisis of the present, the gap between the apparel of literary language and that which it purports to clothe. "Night," an ironic reworking of Pushkin's "Queen of Spades," dismantles the nostalgic imagery of his "Winter Evening." In "Limpopo" the resurrection of Pushkin's feminine muse from his 1825 "To ..." challenges the linear temporality that shapes claims for eternal influence made in "I will build a memorial to myself...." In both stories, Tolstaya exploits paradoxes within Pushkin's *œuvre* to explore oppositions—present vs. past, cultural expression vs. experience—that limit literary representation in her own time. Tolstaya's allusions to Pushkin ultimately express cynicism about the capacity of literary language to provide authenticity in the wake of totalitarianism, but they also celebrate its persistence as an alternative life force that tears through the deadening banality of Soviet routine.

Keywords

Alexander Pushkin, Tolstaya, Night, Limpopo, 1980s Russia, cultural crisis, Russia, literary language, totalitarianism, feminine inspiration, Mother Russia, nostalgia, Russia's literary memory, memory, literary language, clothe, irony, Queen of Spades, Winter Evening, feminine muse, To ..., paradoxes, *œuvre*, present vs. past, present, past, cultural expression, experience, representation, authenticity, Soviet, Soviet Russia

Recollecting Wondrous Moments: Father Pushkin,
Mother Russia, and Intertextual Memory in Tatyana
Tolstaya's "Night" and "Limpopo"

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Russian fiction from the final decade of communist rule provides a welcome alternative to the dichotomy of Soviet purism and anti-Soviet righteousness. The very qualities that have earned it such descriptors as "evil," "grotesque," "outrageous," "dehumaniz[ing]" and "paradoxical" distinguish this body of literature from the numbing rhetoric of Stalinism and its aftermath.¹ As others have, I would argue that its extreme irreverence, including its focus on style to the near exclusion of obvious social concerns, is a response to crisis, an honest reaction to a changing culture where literary language, bent for so long into the service of Soviet totalitarianism, has become a source of ambivalence and distrust. Anthony Vanchu has named this ambivalent situation a "crisis of category" where social roles and codes can be exchanged and confused as easily as costumes, and Mark Lipovetsky identifies its source as "the disintegration of a single socio-cultural language" after Stalin, which, with its devastating effect on Russia's tradition of realist representation, dramatically shifted the paradigm of Russian letters (Vanchu 107; Lipovetsky, "Literature" 147). Looking back from the 1990s, when its stylistic tendencies would spread to popular culture, Helena Goscilo sees the literature of the late Soviet period ironically capitalizing on the "varnishing" techniques of a dying Socialist Realism to pro-

mote surface over substance, and Natal'ia Ivanova reads the grotesque hyperbole of 1980s fiction as the literary rendering of a bloated communist order that has lost its footing (Goscilo, "Style" 16; Ivanova 31). As all of these scholars have argued, both the vibrancy and the troubling character of late Soviet literature arise from a cultural crisis, caused by the erosion of totalitarian power, whose effects deconstruct the foundations of literary language and representation.

Responses to this crisis are manifold in the short fiction of *glasnost*-era writer Tatyana Tolstaya. With its shifting temporalities and incongruous imagery, Tolstaya's highly stylized writing suggests the dislocations and universalizing tendencies that are often associated with postmodernism. However, like Nabokov, the Russian-American postmodernist to whom she has been compared, her writing engages problems of representation particular to Russia (Aleksandrova 308).² Her style is rooted in a national culture whose written literature traditionally expresses heightened sensitivity to linguistic artifice, and whose recent literary history has been scarred by amnesia (Spieker 28).³ Helena Goscilo has argued that one of the most noticeably postmodernist features of Tolstaya's style, its "dense intertextuality," serves what I would call, in the face of this amnesia, a national mission: a "moral imperative" to "recuperate" cultural memory (*Explosive* 150). This mission is best exemplified in Tolstaya's noted intertextual use of Russian literary "father figure" Alexander Pushkin in many of her stories, including "Loves me, Loves me not," "The Okkervil River," "Night," "Limpopo," and her untranslated story "Siuzhet" "The Plot," which revisits and revises the circumstances of the great writer's death (Richards xxiii).⁴ Like Soviet writers Bely, Bulgakov, and Pasternak before her, she alludes to the nineteenth-century icon in her works to call up collective memories of Russia's "epic past" (Betha 35). For her readers, especially those jaded by the Soviet Union's official distortions of reality, Pushkin evokes the Romantic yearning for the fusion of art and life, of language and meaning. References to Russian mythos compound these Romantic evocations in "Night" and "Limpopo," the two stories that will serve as my focus here. To these two texts, first published,

respectively, in 1987 and 1990, Pushkin's own allusions to cultural archetypes bring self-conscious nostalgia for authenticity during a time of literary corruption and crisis. In particular, by recycling Pushkin's archetypes of divine inspiration dressed in female form—which, I will argue, conjure up the enduring national symbol of Mother Russia—"Night" and "Limpopo" highlight the dissonance and gulf between the apparel of language and that which it purports to clothe, the gap out of which Romantic desire is born and the source of crisis in post-Stalinist literary representation.

The crisis at the center of Tolstaya's story "Night" takes the ostensible form of a domestic drama that commences when the desires of its protagonist, balding, middle-aged Alexei Petrovich, compel him to break the rules steadfastly conveyed to him by his devoted eighty-year-old mother, or *mamochka*, as she is childishly called by her son. Confined to a predictable routine within the walls of a typical Soviet apartment, Alexei Petrovich experiences the outside world only in chaperoned excursions with *mamochka*, until the night he temporarily escapes in pursuit of ice cream, and returns much worse for the wear, inspired to write. In her brief review, Margaret Ziolkowski remarks that by portraying "the poignant relationship between a mentally retarded son and his elderly mother . . . made all the more painful because it is related in tones of disjointed and limited comprehension," Tolstaya's story introduces a subject that would not be discussed in most Soviet literature (206). I would argue, however, that its significance consists not primarily in its realist attentions to an ignored social concern, but rather in its figurative commentary on the possibilities of comprehension and communication through language. As Helena Goscilo notes, his mental retardation allows Alexei Petrovich to maintain a childlike perspective, a frame of perception that, as Petr Genis and Aleksander Vail have also discussed, Tolstaya uses in many of her stories to allow for mythic revisions of a world otherwise bereft of magic and possibility (*Explosive* 37, "Gorodok" 147-48). His child's mind thus endows him with the sensitivity and imaginative powers of the Romantic artist, an identity he embraces in his asserted ambi-

tion to follow in the footsteps of Alexander Pushkin and “be a writer” (73). Because retardation thwarts his potential for the mature synthesis of vision and understanding, however, Alexei Petrovich’s case suggests creative stagnancy as well, as evidenced in the compulsive repetition of his “writing”—“Night. Night. Night. Night. Night. Night . . .”—which brings the story to its close (76). Filtering the story’s events, Alexei Petrovich’s infantile consciousness serves as a disorienting narrative device through which the Romantic ideal of organic language allegorically competes with post-Stalinist cynicism about the distance between representation and reality. Thus, although Alexei Petrovich, back from his dangerous adventure, is safe and sound by the story’s end, the real crisis in “Night,” which has to do with the fallibility of literary representation, remains unresolved.

Throughout this abbreviated and ultimately ironic *künstlerroman*, references to Pushkin represent efforts to reconcile the oppositions of authenticity and artifice, to fuse organic experience and cultural expression. Allegorically, these references—some directly intertextual, others more allusive—figure the crisis of writing in terms of the differences between womb and pen, between the regenerative capacities of the mother and the disseminating influences of the father. These oppositions appear to work together in the story’s most explicit example of the “Pushkin motifs” that, as Helena Goscilo points out in her spatial reading of the story, serve as “metonym[ies] for art and creative expression,” encouraging us to see Alexei Petrovich as the great poet’s literary heir (41). In this example, Alexei and Mamochka come across “Pushkin Square” (Tolstaya 72) and the monument to the writer that distinguishes this part of the urban landscape from its surroundings (Goscilo, *Explosive* 41-42). Significantly, and foreshadowing his disastrous flight at the climax of the story, the pair encounters this manmade homage to cultural memory just as the desire for forbidden ice cream, a metonymy for the world of sensual and sexual pleasures from which Mamochka protectively keeps him, tempts Alexei Petrovich toward disobedience. Thus sublimating his immediate, natural urges, the desire to “become a Pushkin” points Alexei Petrovich toward a future that ostensi-

bly meets with Mamochka's approval (Goscilo, *Explosive* 41): "Mamochka, Pushkin—is he a writer?" "A writer." "I'm going to be a writer too." "Of course you will. If you want to, you will" (73).

Transferring the psychic apparatus of wish fulfillment onto the vocation of literary artist, Mamochka's indulgent acquiescence temporarily closes the lid on the Pandora's box of Alexei's latent urges by turning him, figuratively, from sexual to cultural procreation.⁵ She indulgently blesses her child with the power to shape the future with his wishes, appearing thus to dissolve the boundaries between present and future: "if you want to, you will." The utopian temporality suggested by this sequence is even more pronounced in the Russian, "*zakhochesh'—i budesh*," which, without the conditional construction, translates literally as "you want—and you will" (107). Thus Mamochka, by magically merging present and future, diffuses tensions between womb and pen; Alexei Petrovich's ambitions to write need not violate the perpetual maternal symbiosis to which this "late child's" birth has destined him (68). Just as Mamochka's powers over her son derive from her perceived command of time, so "Pushkin," in the form of the Pushkin Square monument, whose presence in the midst of Soviet society attests not only to the checkered history of his enshrinement as cultural founding father but also to the endurance of his influence, affects Alexei Petrovich through the symbolic conflation present and past. Thus, at this allusive moment in "Night," the combined temporal powers of Alexei Petrovich's natural mother and his symbolic, cultural "father" seem capable of fulfilling the utopian promise invested in intertextuality, the literary device by which the past, escaping oblivion as it erupts into the present, opens up limitless possibilities for the future of literary representation.

The story's most self-consciously intertextual reference, its use of four lines from Pushkin's 1825 poem "Winter Evening," confirms this utopian marriage of Rousseauian oppositions, of nature and culture, past and present.⁶ In this example, Tolstaya's text appropriates Pushkin's nostalgic evocation of a maternal muse whose company protects the speaker from the raging snow storm that represents, metaphorically, the press of time, the "winter

evening" at life's end. The poem parallels Tolstaya's story with its representation of "an older female figure as a potential source of solace" against the literal and figurative terrors of night (Goscilo, *Explosive* 42). In Pushkin's lines, this "starushka" 'old woman' refers biographically to the poet's beloved nurse Irina Rodionovich, a powerful mother-figure to whom he dedicated the poem (Pushkin, *Stikhotvorenie* 432), and from whom he first heard the stories of Russian folklore that, according to Joanna Hubbs, "haunted him all his life" (208). An enduring influence on Pushkin (she is the subject of another poem alluded to in Tolstaya's "Loves Me, Loves Me Not"), Irina Rodionovich is believed to have inspired Pushkin's recurring figure of the caring old peasant woman who, as in *Eugene Onegin*, stands for the sincere nature of the countryside that breeds the emotional Tatyana versus the stilted culture in which Olga is a skilled player (Hubbs 212). In "Winter Evening," the speaker pleads with his old nurse to retell the folk tales he remembers from his "poor youth": "Sing me the song of how the blue tit / Quietly lived by the sea / Sing me the song of how the maiden / Went for water at the morn" (197). Linked to the Rousseauian trope of childhood, these images nostalgically elicit collective memories of a simpler, nature-bound Russia; they connect the old nurse, guardian of the speaker's childhood and singer of nature's stories, with a lost paradise of authenticity, a mythic time before language separated Russia's people from its soil. Like Mamochka, the nurse thus harbors magical powers over time. Against the threat of life's end she conjures up memories not only of the speaker's personal childhood but also of a rural Russian past, an era untouched by that notorious cultural innovator, Peter the Great, who serves as her symbolic opposite in Pushkin's literary imagination. As an inspiration for the poem, the maternal nurse links the poet to a peasant-like capacity for feeling and authenticity that those raised in the post-Petrine Russian aristocracy of Pushkin's era—a society more agile with French than Russian—risk losing.

Pushkin's implied trope of the nurse, or mother-figure, as a link to a "natural," literary language takes shape in Tolstaya's story as Mamochka recites "Winter Evening" to her happily receptive

son. The particular lines she reads evoke Rousseauian longing for authentic representation, for a literary utopia where language and life—culture and nature—are experienced as one. Comparing the sounds of the storm to a “beast” that will “howl” and a “child that sobs,” they articulate the Romantic ideal of poetic language imparted to natural forces. Alexei Petrovich, who with his stunted intellect offers a rendition of Rousseau’s natural man, furthers the idea that Pushkin’s language emanates from nature, reacting purely to the poem’s sound quality. He tries to howl along with the verse, and then delights himself by contemplating the sounds of the lines themselves: “Like a beast she’ll howl and cry” becomes “likab eastsheel howland cry” (73).⁷ Through his simple-minded reception, words metamorphose from components of a system of meanings into a series of utterances that are pleasurable in themselves. When he earlier imagines communicating with a pigeon: “you’ll look into its eyes, forget human speech, and start clucking in bird language,” he similarly challenges the barrier language raises between nature and culture, the source of Romantic irony (72). And when, as Helena Goscilo has shown, he becomes the howling wolf of the storm during his terrified wanderings later in the story (*Explosive* 40), he represents the synthesis of culture and nature, of pen and womb, of Pushkin’s poetic influence and Mamochka’s regenerative powers: as wolf-child, he springs both from poetry and maternity.

With its quotation from “Winter Evening” and its consequent appropriation of Pushkin’s metaphorical meanings, Tolstaya’s text thus recovers Romantic dreams of merging language and experience. In doing so, it draws nostalgically upon Russian mythos, clothing its characters in the attire of timeless archetypes. Pushkin’s trope of the peasant nurse, who promises to fulfill the Romantic yearning for authenticity, derives resonance from its implicit connection to the archetype of Mother Russia, and Mamochka, who shares this *starushka*’s powers and furthers her influence by reading Pushkin’s poem aloud to her child, appears in Tolstaya’s story to give form and voice to the mythic, often forbidding powers of nature and nurture associated with that matriarchal figure. Correspondingly, Alexei Petrovich, protected

within the figurative womb of Mamochka's home, renders a version of the folklore figure Ivan the Fool who embodies the cherished Russian values of innocence and submissiveness to a world of mysteries not meant to be understood (Hubbs 146-48). In his unquestioning and loving obedience to "Mamochka" Russia, "Alexei the Fool" becomes rightful heir to the nostalgically imagined legacy of Pushkin that the "Winter Evening" quotation evokes. Literature and myth, culture and nature, present and past, pen and womb: these dichotomies thus appear to dissolve as Tolstaya's text temporarily makes room for Pushkin's. The utopian effect of this intertextual moment is fleeting, however, for the nostalgic import of Pushkin's lines, which figure a fusion of Russia's mythic past with an unlimited future, falls flat against the disorienting incongruities of the story's narrative voice.

Indeed, one of the story's earliest descriptions of Mamochka eschews entirely the utopian nostalgia that emerges with the later reference to Pushkin's "Winter Evening," illustrating instead the hopelessly wide gap between the son's admiring gaze and that of the reader, for whom Mamochka appears almost frighteningly grotesque. In this passage, which, as I will show, alludes to a scene from Pushkin's 1833 tale "The Queen of Spades," the text offers a private, nearly Oedipal view of Mamochka's morning toilette. Suggestive of Freudian crisis, the view nevertheless comprises in Tolstaya's narrative a stable part of Alexei's daily routine. What is unsettling about it is not its impact on the psyche of the protagonist, but rather the absurdity of its representation of Mamochka. With hyperbolic imagery and a sustained metaphor that equates her with an architectural structure, this passage turns the organic figure of the mother, the comforting *starushka* from "Winter Evening," into a constructed and alienating edifice, a collection of laboriously assembled parts:

Mamochka is carrying out her morning ritual: She honks into a handkerchief, pulls her stockings, sticking and pricking, onto the columns of her legs, fastens them under her swollen knees with little rings of white rubber. She hoists a linen frame with fifteen buttons onto her monstrous breast; buttoning it in the back is probably hard. The gray chignon is reattached at Mamochka's

zenith; shaken from a clean nighttime glass, her freshened teeth flutter. Mamochka's facade will be concealed under a white, pleated dickey; and, hiding the seams on the back, the insides out, napes, back stairs, and emergency exits—a sturdy blue jacket will cover the whole thing. The Palace has been erected. (68)

For Alexei Petrovich, this familiar morning ritual assures him of Mamochka's comforting omnipotence: "Mamochka knows everything, can do everything, gets in everywhere. Mamochka is all-powerful. . . . Everything you do is good, Mamochka. . . . Everything's right" (68). For Tolstaya's readers, however, this imposing object of Alexei's worship may evoke not so much the divinity of the archetypal Russian mother as the arbitrary and therefore absurd absolutism of Soviet power. In her essay on the Bakhtinian grotesque in Tolstaya's and Liudmila Petrushevskaya's works, Natal'ia Ivanova highlights a similarly hyperbolic passage from another story by Tolstaya, "The Fakir," to demonstrate how her descriptive technique of absurd exaggeration "captures the collapse of the constructed Soviet universe and its corresponding world view" (27). According to Ivanova, Tolstaya's grotesque imagery, with its subversion and dissolution of bodily boundaries, mirrors the distress of a failing social and political power (21-32). Like the architectural absurdity described in "The Fakir," a building facade whose baroque excess exemplifies the "bombastic depiction" characteristic of Soviet totalitarianism, Mamochka is, to all but her witless son, a shaky institution (Ivanova 25). The instruments of containment and cover-up are all in place, but there is no denying that the "Palace," the site of centralized power, is a sum of pieces that, just as they are put together, can as easily come apart. Thus, while the story's explicitly intertextual references to Pushkin figure the Romantic writer as Mamochka's paternal counterpart, this passage's implicit reference to Tolstaya's earlier "Fakir" suggests that Mamochka fuses mythic matriarchal power with the fading paternalism of Soviet rule; in this absurd portrait, her image recalls the totalitarian order of the 1980s whose allegorical seams are splitting with the expansions of *glasnost'* and *perestroika*.

If we continue to read this story alongside "The Fakir," another significant instance of intertextuality furthers Mamochka's
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portrayal as shaky Soviet façade. As Helena Goscilo has pointed out in her essay on that story's allegory of art, the act of blowing his nose blows the cover of the Fakir who, up until that point, had sustained for his naive audience the illusion of transcendence (*Explosive* 108). In a similarly Gogolian gesture, when Mamochka "honks into her handkerchief" before embarking on her ritual of self-construction, she undermines for Tolstaya's readers the potential divinity to which her son is all too willing to elevate her. Allegorically, the description deflates the mythic power of Mother Russia and exposes the corruption of representation in the long wake of Stalinist censorship. Mamochka the architectural structure stands for the tottering artifice of late-Soviet power; she represents a political order which, as Helena Goscilo has recently observed, carried on through Stalinist "varnishing" the older Russian tradition of the Potemkin Village, the constructed appearance barely disguising a decaying, fallible reality ("Style" 15). Thus, not only does this architectural image of Mamochka compete with her portrayal, encouraged later in the story by the lines from "Winter Evening," as archetypal Mother embodying a lost bond between Russian people and Russian soil, it also exposes the fallacy of that nostalgic ideal. It reminds us that Russia's past was often no more free of representational crises than the late-Soviet present, and indeed, the farcical fairy tale "Palace" that Mamochka becomes could refer more easily to the reigns of Catherine or Peter than to those of Stalin or Gorbachev. In thus mocking Romanticized representations of the past, this architectural trope exposes the fallacy of Romantic efforts to fuse literary language and experience. The absurdly stretched metaphors that describe Mamochka in this passage force readers to see Mamochka as a literary construction. She is put together finally not of parts of her dress but of words and images. While her "façade" is "concealed" by truncated forms of clothing, it is simultaneously revealed by, and as, language. Her alienating portrayal highlights the artifice of language, its distance from anything even remotely organic.

Compounding this representational problem is the referentiality of the passage as a whole, for the entire description

alludes to another literary text that, as I will show, also problematizes the relationship between language and experience. When Alexei Petrovich openly observes his octogenarian mother's morning toilette, he plays in reverse the role of Hermann, the protagonist of Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades," who, in his efforts to wrest from the eighty-year old Countess Anna Fedotovna a secret that will take the risk out of gambling, bears witness to the following nighttime scene:

The Countess began to undress before the looking-glass. Her rose-bedecked cap was unfastened; her powdered wig was removed from her grey, closely-cropped hair. Pins fell in showers around her. Her yellow dress, embroidered with silver, fell at her swollen feet. Hermann witnessed all the loathsome mysteries of her dress; at last, the Countess stood in her dressing-gown and night cap; in this attire, more suitable for her age, she looked less hideous and revolting. (292)

Even more than the specific images that occur in both texts—the swollen ("*raspukhlim*," "*raspukhshimi*") lower extremities, the gray ("*sedki*," "*sedoi*") hairpiece, the various detachable accessories that blur the line between body and clothing—the Soviet story borrows from Pushkin's the overall idea of an absurdly, but also awe-fully, constructed matriarch, whose metaphysical powers seem somehow vested in the pieces of attire that can be assumed or removed at will.⁸ There are noticeable differences, of course. The calculating, evil-intentioned Hermann, who unnaturally bears witness to this distorted Oedipal scene rather than wait for the pretty young Liza whom he could easily seduce, is the antithesis of the guileless Alexei Petrovich, who is driven by natural sex drives he can't fathom and who watches his mother dress with cheerful innocence. Alexei's earnest wish is to obey all the rules he doesn't understand; Hermann's obsessive goal is to control chance and fate—the mysterious rules of the universe—by learning the secret that will make his winnings inevitable. While Alexei finds Mamochka's dressing ritual a reassuring constancy in a perplexing world, Hermann's view of the Countess's undressing focuses on its disorienting senselessness. Impossibly, he bears witness to "mysteries"; paradoxically, he finds the Countess to seem

less “formless” once the accessories that form her high society persona have been removed.⁹ But like Tolstaya’s description of Mamochka, Pushkin’s description of the Countess uses language that accentuates its mediating role. The artificial roses that decorate the Countess’ cap, for example, recall ironically the meanings—of life, love, and beauty—endowed them by poetic language.¹⁰ Serving as a metonymy for the Countess herself, the floral decorations generate a circle of signs that lead us through language not to any living flowers, or even metaphorically to the youthful beauty that once distinguished the Countess, but rather to the impossibility of authenticity that, in her form as overdressed and aging society belle, she now represents. Her evening toilette thus reveals the totality of artifice; it shows that representation—through language, clothing, and other sign systems—is all there is. For Hermann, who manipulates language to his own ends when he writes persuasive but false love letters to Liza, this totality means that the system of signs whose exploitation promised him access to the Countess’s secret will become the source of his downfall; when his failure to win at fate drives him mad, he manifests his insanity with the compulsive repetition of four words: “Three, seven, ace. Three, seven, queen” (305). In Pushkin’s horror story, language becomes a terrifying trap from which there is no escape. Hermann’s monomania allegorically represents the endless circularity of representation, the failure, and indeed the hubris, of the Romantic effort to capture nature’s mysteries with human art.

Tolstaya’s oblique allusion in “Night” to Pushkin’s “Queen of Spades” suggests that this Romantic pursuit of mastery over signs persists in 1980s reality, but her reversals of Pushkin’s text indicate a cynical resignation to its futility. Contrasting with Hermann’s tragic fate, Alexei Petrovich’s story has a classically comic ending. Like Hermann, Tolstaya’s character explores taboo territory when he flees from his mother’s apartment in search of ice cream, and, like Hermann also, he experiences guilty terror in consequence of his deed. In addition, Alexei parallels Hermann when he violates the sacred powers of maternity. As Joanna Hubbs has shown, Pushkin’s story links the Countess Fedotovna, whom

Hermann inadvertently kills with fright, to archetypes of matriarchal divinity (Hubbs 214). Hermann's matricidal violation may be compared to the fright Alexei gives Mamochka, who takes on the stature of divinity in his eyes, when he runs away from her. Unlike Hermann, however, Alexei Petrovich is restored to his natural world, and to the sacred realm of the womb, by the end of the story. Mamochka finds him, brings him back into their "den," and feeds him maternal foods: runny eggs and warm milk (76). Rather than being destroyed by the archetypal mother, as Hermann is, Alexei is rejuvenated. However, in his somewhat startling "renewal" as a writer, in which, after securing paper and pencil from Mamochka, he "hurriedly writes the newly acquired truth in big letters," obsessively covering the blank sheet with the repeated word "night," Alexei Petrovich seems to be recharged by monomania, the same mental affliction that destroys Hermann (76). Thus, two roles shape this final image of the Soviet Pushkin. Obtaining his materials from Mamochka, and attempting to express his experience within the solace of her home, Alexei Petrovich is once again the loyal fool, and the limitations of his penciled expression testify in reverse to the contrasting power of the womb from which he was temporarily and mistakenly separated. But Pushkin's daring engineer—a manipulator of language whose mental powers ultimately turn against him—resurfaces in this closing portrait of the artist as well. Ivan the Fool and Hermann the Engineer; mother's son and matricide; creature-of-the-womb and creator-with-the-pen(cil): Alexei Petrovich's development as a writer suspends him between competing identities, neither of which he can fully realize.

As it thus illustrates the impossibility of marrying womb and pen, of achieving the Romantic utopia where the constructions of language are wed to organic experience, Alexei Petrovich's story represents allegorically the dilemma of the writer trapped within the sealed realm of the Soviet Union, where totalitarian culture masquerades clumsily and grotesquely as nature. Indeed, Alexei Petrovich's stunted mental capacities, which allow for his readiness to submit so totally to the will of his mother as "palace," may represent the creative stagnation of the times in which Tolstaya

came of age in the 1970s, a time described by Maya Koreneva as “a complete standstill . . . as impassable, muddy, and engulfing as a swamp . . .” (192). The absurdities of an educational system under totalitarian censorship compounded the problem by creating wide gaps of knowledge, so that even during the thaw of the 1960s Soviet writers developed in ignorance of their predecessors (Belaia 10). In terms of creative possibility, official Russian writing could thus be seen as developmentally stagnated, kept from growth and confined to such a small space that one word, written over and over, could effectively convey the extent of its permissible expression. Intertextuality, the appropriation of writing from a freer past, becomes, in such a situation, the only apparent way out.

With its imaginative but mentally-retarded writer-protagonist, Tolstaya's 1980s story illustrates the fate of language and literary representation in the wake of such repressions. The allegory about writing that shapes up by the end of the story suggests that Alexei Petrovich is not exceptional in his inability to make meanings from signs: his state of mind is symptomatic of a national culture where language has been cynically manipulated to limit experience, where Mother Russia, whose matriarchal powers include endless regeneration, has been taken over by Stalin's paternal legacy of authoritarian restriction. The text's various references to Pushkin—from Pushkin Square to “Winter Evening,” from “The Queen of Spades” to the final ironic image of the Romantic artist as anti-genius—raise the possibility of using the past to recuperate authenticity. Ultimately, however, they point to the failure of this Romantic project. Metaphorically, Stalin has displaced Pushkin as influential cultural father, and the absurdities of Soviet representation, including its repressions and distortions of the past, obscure the ideals of Romanticism. Just beneath the story's comic surface, then, lies the tragedy of losing the link between representation and authentic experience. The story that tells of Mamochka's powerful love also narrates the crisis of losing the meaningful use of language, the powers of comprehension and communication that keep at bay the undifferentiated and terrifyingly monotonous darkness of night.

Like "Night," Tolstaya's longer story "Limpopo," the most recent of her stories translated into English, expresses tensions between Romantic and post-Stalinist ideas of representation, between the possibilities and the fallibilities of literary language. If "Night" may be read as an allegory illustrating the late-Soviet writer's limitations, "Limpopo" suggests an elegy for literature amidst the cultural ruins of twentieth-century Russia. At the same time, however, "Limpopo" offers an intertextual alternative to the definitive, "claustrophobic," conclusion of "Night" (Goscilo, *Explosive* 43). In this story, which is set in the stagnated 1970s and traces the spiritual and geographical wanderings of a group of friends that includes an African immigrant, Pushkin is both historical figure, providing a nostalgic link to Russia's past, and messianic hero, holding promise for the future. Intertextual references to the father of Russian literature in "Limpopo" counter with literature's potentially regenerative capacities the obliterating effects of Soviet progress.

The narrator of the story is a minor character in its events, which center on the lives of her friends Lyonechka, a committed poet whose passion for language gets him into scrapes with Soviet authorities, and Judy, the African veterinary student with whom Lyonechka hopes to produce a new Pushkin, a descendent who would inherit poetic talent from him and a version of Pushkin's exotic, African heritage from her. Just as "Night" presents a protagonist whose mental retardation puts him at odds with his world, "Limpopo" introduces characters who don't quite understand or fit into their environment. In addition to the excessively passionate Lyonechka, whose frankly written obituaries displease his editors, and who is, despite his insistence on sincerity in writing about death, not adverse to mixing fact and fiction when it comes to stories of his beloved Judy; there is Judy herself, brought to the hostile cold of Russia by an enthusiastic desire to heal animals who take on fantastic proportions in her foreign imagination; as well as Lyonechka's politically correct Uncle Zhenya, whose obsession with making the opposite journey to Africa leads to his demise at the claws and teeth of its wild animals. The friend who steps from a rooftop to his death in the belief that fireworks dis-

plays for a worker's holiday signal the Second Coming exemplifies most poignantly the fate of those whose poetic temperaments fail to equip them for the dangerous banalities of real Soviet life. By the end of the story, Judy, still not pregnant with the new Pushkin, has died of pneumonia, and the grieving Lyonechka disappears from civilization, possibly to become the reported "wild man" who lives in the forest. The failed project of reproducing Pushkin underlines and connects the story's tangents; the so-called primitive, the artistically-inclined, the idealistic, the spiritual sons and daughters of Pushkin—these more traditionally Romantic souls cannot thrive in Soviet reality. Their fates illustrate not only the violent repression of otherness in Brezhnev's reactionary order, but also, metaphorically, the distortion and destruction of literary language by its ideological machinery.

Like Mamochka in "Night," Judy plays the role of maternal muse in "Limpopo," her very fertility inspiring in Lyonechka desires to revive Pushkin's legacy. Although in many ways the meek, silent, and ultimately dead Judy seems the antithesis of the powerful, commanding, and enduring Mamochka, the two female characters share roots in the Russian archetype of divine matriarchy. Judy's connections to Mother Russia, which traverse the irony of her African heritage, include not only her projected status as the biological mother of Pushkin and thus the natural source of Russian culture, but also her would-be vocation as veterinarian, as healer and protector of the creatures of the earth. The story's title, "Limpopo," which refers to the destination of Dr. Doolittle in a child's rhyme, associates Judy with that fictional doctor of animals, and suggests that she, like him, possesses the utopian power to talk to animals, to communicate with nature on a transcendent level. Her alienation from Soviet society, and from its language in particular, reinforces Judy's portrayal as the archetypal symbol of the precultural "mother earth" with its mute and mysterious powers (Hubbs 40). Her new compatriots cannot pronounce her given, African name, and know her only by their constructed replacement. Similarly, her native country, obliterated by wars and redrawn boundaries, can be imagined by her untraveled Soviet friends only in the crudest of stereotypes, the wildest

of fictions. The continent of Africa, the cradle of humanity and the generalized place of "Judy's" origins, thus becomes a trope for the regenerative powers of the imagination in the face of absence, for against a provinciality enforced by a paranoid political regime, Judy's Soviet friends, like Judy herself, stretch the capacities of language to create a new, fictional reality for their African friend. Africa is, after all, the birthplace of Pushkin's grandfather, and when in "Limpopo" its untamed animals tear to pieces the overconfident Soviet opportunist, Uncle Zhenya, who is willing to manipulate whatever political powers he can to remove the "obstacle" of his poet nephew Lyonechka, the violent death avenges not only miscalculated nature but also the poetic imagination for which Lyonechka, like Pushkin before him, is unjustly persecuted. As an emanation of Africa's mysterious and magically regenerative powers, then, "Judy" represents not only a link to Russia's literary past—to the multi-ethnic heritage of its seminal author—but also to a future where the unlimited possibilities of imaginative literature are restricted by neither law nor language.

Thus, like Mamochka, who conflates present and future in three words to her son, "*zakhochesh—i budesh*," Judy, in her effect as maternal muse, seems to efface the temporal as well as spatial boundaries that otherwise trap her Soviet friends within the monotony of totalitarianism. Intertextually, I would argue that her magical associations connect her not only to Pushkin's general archetype of the feminine muse, but also to its specific manifestation in his 1825 poem entitled "To . . .," in which the speaker remembers a "*chudnoe mgnoven'e*" 'wondrous moment' (192) of divine inspiration when this ineffably feminine muse appears to him and, through the powers of memory, reawakens in him the forces of life and creativity:

I recollect a wondrous moment
 Before me you appeared
 Like a fleeting apparition
 Like the genius of pure beauty. (193)

In these opening lines to Pushkin's poem, inspiration, which is conflated with romantic attraction as the work develops, appears

out of nothing, “miraculously,” forging the Romantic link between poetic and spiritual epiphanies.¹¹ In Tolstaya’s story, this miracle of something out of nothing, as in a virgin birth, is associated with Judy. Like the subject of Pushkin’s poem, she is unnameable, yet she is a source of divinity and regeneration, her womb the would-be site of Pushkin’s second coming. This “wondrous” paradox of Judy, the muse who inspires out of nothingness, can be seen in the portrayal of Lyonechka’s first encounter with her as she comes inside from the foreign, Russian cold:

We unwound scarves, scarves, and more scarves; wraps, plaid shawls, shawls made of goat yarn with knots and splinters, shawls that were gauzy and orange, with gold threads, shawls of blue linen and striped linen; we unwound; we looked: what was left of her to reside? . . . only a little pillar of living darkness . . . that was all there was. But Lyonechka was instantly captivated, bewitched, spellbound. . . . (135)

Like the description of Mamochka’s morning ritual, this image of Judy emphasizes feminine apparel to illustrate metaphorically the artifice of linguistic representation. However, if the representation of Mamochka’s dressing ritual, with its grotesquely stretched and mixed metaphors, distances the reader from the organic reality of the mother, the extended image that spins out with dazzling shape and color Judy’s removal of scarf after scarf has a seductively mesmerizing effect. “Night” portrays the labored construction of Mamochka’s powerful persona. This passage witnesses Judy’s paradoxical dis/appearance beneath the clothing of representation. The absence suggested by the rhetorical question “what was left of her . . .?” belies the magical, regenerative effect that the metaphorically mixed “pillar of living darkness” will have on the poet Lyonechka. To adapt an analogy that Robert Porter has used to describe the character of Tolstaya’s writing in general, the endlessly unwinding scarves carry the magical powers to enchant, to stay the moment of truth and death like the one thousand and one stories of the Arabian nights (69). Hyperbolic repetition builds depth and color onto Judy’s veils so that they leave the dazzle of substance, if not substance itself. In revealing nothing, Judy’s scarves thus expose the limitless referentiality, and possi-

bility, of literary language, along with its mesmerizing duality of regeneration and deception.

This duality can have dangerous consequences, however; "Limpopo" elaborately weaves varied discourses of 1970s Russia to show how vulnerable literary language is to the violence of totalitarian rhetoric. The chilling treatise from the violent General Zmeev, just after he has randomly shot one of the story's zealously communist characters and just before he shoots a group of Africans "like toys," is perhaps the most shocking example: "Shooting—is beautiful. It's moving . . . after all, what do we value in life—what pleasures, I mean? In pickles—we value the crunch, in kisses—the smack, and in gunshots—the loud, clear bang" (186). His speech finds poetics in violence: aesthetic rhythm, as in the parallelism of the sentence structure, turns listeners away from the appalling content to the pleasures of language for its own sake. Like the mentally retarded Alexei Petrovich, the spiritually stunted General Zmeev appreciates the sound quality, not just of language but of the mechanisms of the world which, in their "beauty," mimic literary representation. But while Alexei Petrovich's sensitivity to the sounds of language single him out as an ironic version of the Romantic artist, socially isolated in his "genius," General Zmeev is not only at home in his social environment, he, and his worldview, controls it. The conclusions to which this passage bring us echo the effects of another example: an earlier passage in which the Soviet zealot Perkushkov clothes the goals of the "Final Resolutions"—as banal as other twentieth century evils that the phrase evokes—in the dramatic descriptions and lofty language of the biblical revelations: "and behold, the hour chimeth, and it cannot be foreseen, a voice thundereth—and who would dare envision it?" (176). Just as Pushkin, in "The Bronze Horseman," uses a biblical tone to critique ironically the pretensions of Peter the Great (Hubbs 224), so Tolstaya parodies Soviet rhetoric to mock the alleged ambitions of the Soviet project. This, Perkushkov admonishes Lyonechka, should be the subject of poetry: the language of apocalyptic spirituality elevating the deadening banality of Soviet totalitarianism. From Perkushkev's deceptive regeneration of the Bible as Soviet revelation it is a

short trip to General Zmeev's aesthetic violence, to the use of literary aesthetics to justify the taking of life.

Indeed, the narrative of "Limpopo," which traces this tragic course, could be said in itself to portray such revelatory violence on an allegorical level; its thematics and the fates of most of its sympathetic characters suggest an apocalyptic ending for Russian poetry, culture, and for civilization itself. Anticipation of this end begins with the story's opening, where the sad fate of Judy, potential healer of animals and mother of Pushkin, portends the demise of poetry wed to life. From the beginning, Judy's character raises the specter of oblivion. Not only is her real name universally "forgotten," but her country of origin was obliterated by political upheaval and change. Her native ways of life are incomprehensible to those around her and therefore lost in a blur of fact. Lyonechka's fiction, and generally held stereotypes, even her grave are misplaced in Perestroika's rapid movement toward the future. The narrator tells us from the opening that "Judy's little grave was dug up last year and a highway was laid down in its place" (133). The highway, like the train tracks on which Anna Karenina dies, represents metaphorically the destructive effects of technological progress, in this case a late manifestation of the Soviet Union's ruthless industrialization at the expense not only of the countryside, but also of the fast eroding peasant way of life, the realm of the mythic Mother Russia. The cars that pass along this projected highway, their passengers ignorant of and indifferent to the memory of Judy whose loss they help to perpetuate, offer postmodern versions of the "chronotope" of the steed that, according to David Bethea, traditionally represents in Russian literature, from "The Bronze Horseman" on, a hastening toward the apocalyptic end of Russian civilization (45).

Despite the many thematic elements in Tolstaya's story reinforcing this apocalyptic theme, and contrary to conclusions that might be drawn from the cumulative effect of Judy's death, Lyonechka's disappearance, and, at the closing of the story, the rapidly fading influence of Russia's seminal author, "Limpopo" offers through its allusions and intertextual references to Pushkin's poetry an alternative to the linear progression of the

apocalyptic narrative, which obliterates past and present in its focus on the end. Opposition to the constraints of linear, historical time is, according to several critical readers of her work, a thematic concern in many of Tolstaya's stories. Vail and Genis have noted Tolstaya's resistance to "neostanovimy beg vremeni" 'the unstoppable race of time,' and Raisa Shishkova argues for the timelessness of Tolstaya's stories, whose elements "mogli by prespokoino zhit v liuboi' epokh" 'could exist in any epoch without causing a stir' (148, 399). As in many of her earlier stories, the potentially obliterating effects of anchored, linear progression are countered in "Limpopo" by memory. Rather than the personal reminiscences that generate the narratives of stories like "The Circle" or "Most Beloved," however, memory in "Limpopo" is enabled through the intertextual resurrection of the past.

Pushkin's poem "To . . ." expresses this central theme in its second word, "pomnyu," '[I] remember, recollect,' and Tolstaya appropriates the idea of recollecting in her portrayal of Judy as late-twentieth century reenactment of Pushkin's muse (192). Judy, as we have seen, defies revelation; she may be uncovered and unwrapped, but language cannot get to the end of her. She is in this sense anti-apocalyptic. As Pushkin's nurse with her songs protects her beloved poet from the storms of winter, so Judy, with her scarves, wards off the inevitable press of time's end. Like the "fleeting apparition" in "To . . .," Judy serves as a tonic for the devastation of creative sterility. Her brief existence carries the power of the "*mgnoven'e*," the instant, or isolated, "wondrous" moment, in which the past erupts into the present, raising the possibility of countering linear time with literature (Pushkin, "K. . . ." 192). In the atemporal instant of inspiration, whose spatial counterpart is the translingual utopia evoked by the story's title, not only does the dichotomy of past and present disappear, but the barrier that in "Night" inhibits the freedoms of language—expressed metaphorically as the tension between the natural realm of the birthing mother and the cultural realm of the writing father—also collapses in creative revelry. By the end of "Limpopo," as I will show, Father Pushkin becomes Mother Russia, and the silent, barren Judy becomes an emblem for the monumental reach of the pen.

In the final, elegiac paragraphs of "Limpopo," the narrator and Lyonechka's aunt gaze upon the statue that memorializes Pushkin's grave, mourning the loss of Judy and Lyonechka and reflecting regretfully that "If they'd just made a little more effort, perhaps he would have been born" (192). While, as in "Night," the crafted, lifeless Pushkin monument represents the persistence of the great writer's influence, it also creates a contrast with the alternative, living "monument" that Judy's child, like Alexei Petrovich, could have become. The dichotomy of life and stone is softened as the narrator and Aunt Zina project divine powers onto the rendered image of Pushkin, "as if expecting that he" bless everyone:

Bless those near and far, crawling and flying, deceased and unborn, tender and scaly, bivalve and molluscan; bless those who sing in the groves and curl up in the bark of trees, who buzz amid the flowers and crowd in a column of light; bless those who vanished amid the feasts, in the sea of life, and in the dismal abysses of the earth. (192)

The incantatory cataloging of this image revives linguistically the Romantic ideal of the poet's sacred connection to the multiplicity of nature. Indeed, Pushkin's image here resurrects the divine mother goddess whose overriding powers transcend oppositions ("near and far . . . deceased and unborn") to embrace those lost in the violence of patriarchal progress, from the ancient tree goddesses, or *rusalki* (Hubbs 31), to those whom Stalin's reign condemned to oblivion. In this wishful thinking at the end of Tolstaya's story, Pushkin's own image takes on the role of the maternal muse, and with that role, the divine manifestation of nature and its many forms that has been attributed to the archetype of Mother Russia. As muse figure, Pushkin inspires Lyonechka's aunt to begin reciting his poetry: "and the Slav's proud grandson now grown wild . . ." but she is unable to remember more than this fragment. The last words of the story poignantly reinforce the theme of oblivion: "How does the rest of the poem go?" "I don't remember," I say, "Let's leave, Aunt Zina, before the police chase us off." "And it's true, I don't remember another word" (192).

allegorically represent the Soviet repression of memory. However, while the narrator's amnesia at the close of the narrative thus suggests the triumph of Soviet progress, the intertextual life of the forgotten poem provides a different paradigm for understanding the story's end.

Significantly, the poem whose lines have been all but forgotten by the narrator and her mother are from Pushkin's "I will build a memorial to myself . . ." (1936) whose Latin epigraph, "Exegi Monumentum," refers to Horace's poem of a similar theme. In Pushkin's poem, the legacy of his poetry becomes a metaphorical "pamyatnik" 'memorial' whose influence and endurance challenge the reach of the comparable "Aleksandriiskogo Stolpa" 'Alexander Pillar' (394). Pushkin thus uses the phallic image of manmade monuments competing for closeness to the skies to assert the endurance of his poetic influence among future generations of the disseminated Russian peoples ("Slav," "Finn," "Tungus," "Kalmik" [395]). But as the poem progresses, phallic hubris, the self-glorification borrowed from the Latin poem, turns to the traditional Russian values, long linked to Mother Russia, of humility and compassion. His poetry survives because it inspires "kind feelings" and "mercy" during his "cruel century"; the muse is enjoined to meet "praise" with "indifference," "and not to argue with 'the fool.'"¹² In quoting a fragment from Pushkin's poem, Tolstaya's story reinforces the poem's analogy between Pushkin's legacy and that of classical civilization, which endures in memory only. Her narrative also resurrects the poem's portrayal of literature as the creation of both phallic, or seminal, and maternal forces. Not accidentally, then, is Judy described in Lyonechka's first vision of her as a "stolbik zhivoi temnoty" 'little pillar of living darkness' (46). By the end of the story, that enigmatic metaphor links her to the phallic imagery of the Alexander Pillar, the standard by which Pushkin's speaker measures his literary prowess, and connects the "living darkness" of her African heritage—lost but perpetually imagined—to that of classical civilization, itself a trope for both the fragility and the endurance of cultural memory. The image associates her as well with the mysterious "stolbe sveta" 'column of light' into which

crowd the victims that the metaphysically maternal Pushkin blesses (70). Dead light and “living darkness” both suggest the paradox of intertextual memory, through which repressed elements of past civilizations gain second life through the monuments of literature. Thus, while the last sentence of “Limpopo” (“I don’t remember another word”) may signal the “end” of Russian letters, the resurrection of Judy’s presence through the allusion to Pushkin’s poem suggests a cyclical temporality alternative to linear progression. To use the folk image that Mark Lipovetsky sees recurring in Tolstaya’s work, we see that the “end” may be just another turn of the archetypal Wheel of Fortune, through which death opens up the possibility of new life (*Russian* 228).

Though mitigated by irony, this hopeful theme persists in Tolstaya’s last story, “Siuzhet” ‘The Plot,’ where the historical moment of Pushkin’s untimely death by a gunshot wound in a duel fictionally transforms into a consequential glitch in the author’s long life, which culminates in a fateful meeting with communist Russia’s future leader, a very young Vladimir (“Volodya”) Lenin. Like “Limpopo,” “The Plot” also refers intertextually to Pushkin’s “I will build a memorial to myself . . .”; the poem’s line, “i dolgo budu tem liubezen ia narodu” ‘and for that I will long be beloved of the people,’ opens the story as its first epigraph. This seemingly prophetic quotation, along with a second epigraph that quotes the last stanza from Blok’s “Pushkin House,” celebrates the legacy of Pushkin not only as literary father but also as monumental cultural saviour. And indeed Tolstaya’s fictional Pushkin is a saviour, for while his longer life does not result in greater works of literature, it does change the course of history. The aging, unrecognized Pushkin beats a scrappy, juvenile Lenin unconscious in retaliation for hitting him—ultimately fatally—with a snowball, unintentionally turning the boy’s rebellious personality into an aristocratic one. Thus Pushkin unwittingly saves Russia from communism, and the country moves into the twentieth century with its traditional tsarist structure intact.

As its title thus suggests, “The Plot” experiments with temporality as a fundamental component not only of fictional but also of historical narrative. In postmodern fashion, the story renders

sianic plots, apocalyptic endings, or, in the Marxist worldview, the inevitable withering away of the classes. In "The Plot" the natural realm of Mother Russia with its non-linear temporality of banal incidentals rules events. Thus, unexpected bird droppings cause D'Anthes to falter in his duel with Pushkin, leaving the poet alive, if severely wounded, and able—only by chance—to cross paths at the end of his life with Lenin. As self-consciously plotted as Tolstaya's last short story is, it ultimately undermines the idea of overall design. In "The Plot," the great moments in history happen by chance, and the only determining constant is the inevitable turning of fortune's wheel.

The image of this turning wheel, as exemplified in "Limpopo" as well as in "The Plot," may be used to place Tolstaya's work as a whole within the context of the cataclysmic decade that saw her creative flourishing. A time of endings and beginnings, the late 1980s in Russia revealed cracks in the foundation of a political—and literary—establishment nearing its final days. For Tolstaya's writings, inherent paradoxes found in the *œuvre* of Russia's foundational writer provide a means of expressing the crises of the period. The Romantic nostalgia of "Winter Evening" pitted against the ironic revelation of "The Queen of Spades" creates in "Night" a *glasnost*'-era allegory emphasizing the limitations of representation through language during a time of revived expectations. In "Limpopo," the cyclical time of "To . . ." tempers the linear progression glorified in "I will build a memorial . . ." to highlight, on the eve of communism's last stand, the impossibility of permanence. In both stories, however, the recollection of "wondrous moments," intertextual references that emphasize the perpetual paradoxes of literary language, suggests the possibility of shining new light on the "night" or "darkness" of a tradition scarred by Stalinist amnesia. Tolstaya's modern day allusions to Pushkin's Romantic mythos may express cynicism about the capacity of literary language to provide authenticity in the wake of totalitarian censorship, but they also celebrate its persistence as a kind of alternative life force that tears through the deadening banality of the Soviet routine. Written in the shadow of the Soviet Union's demise, her stories "Night" and "Limpopo" offer intertextual

memories of "Father" Pushkin and Mother Russia as solace and goad to what Victor Erofeyev has called a confused "household of Russian letters" facing the death of Soviet literature (xii).

Notes

1 Erofeyev ix; Ivanova; Porter 2; Ovanesian 249; Lipovetsky, "Literature" 149. A summary of Russian critical responses to this phenomenon of "drugaiia proza" 'alternative prose' can be found in Evgenii Ovanesian's essay "Tvortsy raspada" 'Creators of Decay.'

2 Rather than categorize Tolstaya as a postmodernist writer, I would maintain, along with Lipovetsky ("Literature" 149) and Goscilo (*Explosive* 7), that her work bears postmodernist (along with modernist) features. For discussions of Russian (as opposed to "Western" or capitalist-based) postmodernism, see Lipovetsky (*Russian Postmodernist Fiction*), Porter, and Spieker.

3 The relatively recent, and, according to Zenkovsky, "somewhat artificial" development of literary language in Russia may be the source of this tradition (2), which is perhaps best exemplified by the use of the narrative technique Shklovskii terms "ostranenie" 'estrangement' in the works of Tolstoy and other Russian writers. For Pushkin, as in Eugene Onegin and "The Queen of Spades," the opposition of false versus sincere language, especially in the wake of Peter the Great's reforms, is also a thematic concern.

4 In *The Explosive Fiction of Tatyana N. Tolstaya*, Helena Goscilo has discussed the significance of references to Pushkin in Tolstaya's stories "Loves me, Loves me Not," "Night," and "Okkervil River." As I will discuss here, "Limpopo" and "The Plot" also focus on the figure of this influential writer.

5 Although "Night" easily lends itself to a psychoanalytic interpretation, it's not my intention here strictly to conduct such a reading. I see Tolstaya's use of Freudian narratives in many of her stories, including "Loves Me, Loves Me Not," "On the Golden Porch," and "Peters," as another example of intertextual appropriation that recreates the eroding ideas of a teleologically developed psyche. For a Kleinian psychoanalytic reading of "On the Golden Porch," see the essay by Rancour-

6 These lines are made more self-consciously intertextual by their previous appearance in the writings of Bulgakov (Goscilo, *Explosive* 184).

7 "To kak zver' ona zavoet" becomes "Tokag, zveria, naza, voet" (Reka 108).

8 In the Russian, the phrase translated as "hideous and revolting" 'uzhasnyi i bezobraznyi' literally means "awful and formless" (366).

9 Bezobraznyi (see above).

10 As in, for example, Pushkin's simile, "devich'i litsa yarche roz" 'girl's faces brighter than roses' from "The Bronze Horseman" (402, 403).

11 "Chudnoe," translated by Walter Arndt as "wondrous," derives from "chud," miracle (192).

12 "Chto chuvstva dobrie ia liroi probizhdal, / Chto vmoi zhestokii vek vosslavil ia Svobodu/ I milost' k padshim prizyval / Chvalu i klavetu priemli ravnodushno / I ne osporivai gluptsa." 'That I awakened kind feelings with my lyre / that in my cruel century I glorified Freedom / And called for mercy towards the fallen' (395).

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